

Christmas Eve
Christ and Grace
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Luke 2:1-20
December 24, 2019

There is a very important question that seems to appear with the holiday baking every year, and the question is this: Do you say p Kahn or P can? Several of us had this very important discussion in the church office last week. We were firm in our respective positions, and were left unchanged in our preferred pronunciations. We agreed to disagree on how to pronounce the name of these nuts, but we all agreed that we love them in many ways! Christmas baking, with pecans or pecans is one of many ways we prepare to celebrate Christmas and I'm sure your family has clear opinions on what foods are served at Christmas, but in the end, Christmas is all about memories and love.

Sunday we had our Christmas Pageant and the church was filled with energy and joy. The pageant is another Christmas tradition that is important in our church family. We are never sure how the pageant will go. There are sometimes some meltdowns or messed up lines. Often there are adults who join in, taking a part because the pageant tradition that was always so meaningful for them is even more meaningful now. No matter who is playing what part and no matter how the script goes (or does not go!), in the end, Christmas is all about memories and love.

I would venture a guess that most of us are here tonight because of memories and love. Even though we hear the same story from the gospel of Luke and sing the same carols, something draws us here again and again. We find comfort and hope in the familiar, as we are taken back in time to our childhood memories of Christmas. We don't want Christmas to change, we don't want the story to change; we cherish the memories and love because they make us feel safe in a world that we know is not always safe.

And yet, the irony cannot be overlooked, that on the very feast of the nativity of Jesus our Savior, when we need for nothing to change, we are celebrating the greatest moment of change in human history. We are celebrating the moment when God enters our world and nothing is ever the same after that.

Incarnation means change. It means God coming into our time and space, into our lives, and into our comfort zones and shaking things up, challenging us to change our perspectives and to be willing to do a new thing; to be co-creators with God in the world around us. We are celebrating the greatest change ever, even as we long for nothing to change!

And so Christmas is important because it connects these two things – tradition and change. It is good to be sentimental at Christmas, to wrap ourselves in the warmth of our memories and love, for that is what sustains us the other 364 days of the year. Our memories and love give us the strength to move through the inevitable changes of life.

The shepherds in the field had no idea how their lives were about to change. And when the angel appeared and the glory of the Lord shone around them they were terrified. Surely, they sensed a great change was about to occur as the very hairs of their heads must have tingled in all that glory! And the angel said to them, as angels always do, "Do not be afraid: for see – I am

bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.” And the shepherds were reminded of how God had always loved them and cared for them. Because of memories and love, they knew that the child being born would be the bearer of so much more love than they could ask or imagine.

When the world overwhelms us and we cannot imagine how we will manage to endure it, remember that the Christmas story has endured. Year after year, decade after decade, century after century, God has been with us in this world. Emmanuel, God with us.

So how shall we celebrate Christmas this year? How will we connect our memories and love with the changes and challenges that are always a part of life? We will do what we have always done. We will come here and wrap ourselves in the memories and the love as we hear about angels and shepherds and the baby in the manger. And then, strengthened and renewed, we will step out in our own incarnation, pick up our gifts and go to work with God to face the changes in our lives, even as we make changes in the world that will bring glory to God in the highest.

Hold onto your Christmas memories and treasure them for they are part of who you are, and they are the source of your strength to endure in this world. And remember that the story goes on, that the baby Jesus grows up and loves us with his very life, and that this amazing love changes everything. Amen.